

Colorado's Higher Education-Based Teacher Preparation

In Colorado, 18 institutions of higher education recommend newly prepared teachers to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) for licensure. The institutions are public and private and scattered across the state, serving the needs of both urban and rural schools. The institutions are both large and small and located on traditional campuses as well as in cyber-space. Colorado-based institutions prepare approximately 50% of the new teachers hired across the 178 Colorado school districts. Further information regarding enrollments in Colorado teacher preparation programs can be found in a 2008 report prepared by the Department of Higher Education

http://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Publications/Reports/Legislative/TED/200812_TED_toGGA.pdf

This document is intended to provide readers with information regarding six basic elements that underpin the preparation of new teachers at Colorado's colleges and universities.

- 1. Colorado teacher preparation programs are jointly delivered by Schools/Colleges/Departments of Education and Schools/Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences.** A college student wishing to earn an undergraduate degree and a teaching license has the same general education requirements and the same requirements for their selected major as any other undergraduate in that major who graduates with a Baccalaureate of Arts or Science. The difference is that an undergraduate who wants to earn a teaching license must also take coursework that is necessary for teacher licensure in the State of Colorado. As an example, a student who wants to teach math in a high school must complete his/her general education courses, a mathematics major, and teacher licensure coursework. Embedded in the classes within the teacher licensure courses are 800 hours of clinical practice in middle and high schools. Thus, undergraduate teacher candidates carry the course and school-based clinical experiences required for licensure as though it were a "double major." Those prospective teachers who already have undergraduate degrees must have a degree in the field s/he wishes to teach and must enter either a post-baccalaureate teacher education program or a licensure plus master's program in order to become teachers. Alternative licensure programs that involve taking a teaching position, and then learning to teach while working with their first class of students, is also an option for this group. All those who wish to be licensed in the state of Colorado must pass a state (PLACE) or national (PRAXIS II) exam in their licensure content area(s).
- 2. Colorado teacher education programs have high admissions standards.** Although higher education teacher education programs set their own standards, all but one state institution requires a minimum of a 2.75 GPA in their major area for admission into the teacher preparation licensure program, and most do not admit students until their

junior year. A number of institutions that keep average records of GPA's for teacher candidates find that it is not unusual for an admissions class to sport a 3.0 average GPA or higher at the undergraduate or graduate level. The idea that teacher candidates are among the least capable students on a college campus does not apply in Colorado. Further, other criteria play an important role in admissions, including letters of recommendation, interviews and criminal background checks. Once admitted, students must meet the performance-based standards set by CDE, and, when they do not, they are counseled out of or released from the teacher preparation program.

3. **Colorado teacher education is standards-based and performance-based.** As a result of Senate Bill 154, all teacher candidates (including elementary, secondary and special education) must demonstrate competence in eight performance-based standards including: literacy, math, democratic schooling, individualized instruction, standards and assessment, content knowledge, classroom management and knowledge of technology. Some institutions have added their own standards to complement those mandated by CDE. The bill also required that the actual teaching performance of teacher candidates be the determining factor for recommendation to CDE for licensure. A specific performance-based requirement was that teacher candidates complete a "teacher work sample." The teacher work sample requires teacher candidates to assess students relative to a set of standards established for each discipline, to write a unit of study that is designed to help students meet those standards, to teach the unit to students, and to assess resulting student-learning. Teacher education programs gather performance-based assessment data on teacher candidates from the start of the program to its finish, recording teacher candidates' knowledge and skills. This information is not only used to evaluate individual students, it is systematically reviewed and used to improve teacher preparation programs.
4. **Colorado teacher education requires 800 hours of clinical experience.** Senate Bill 154 also required higher education-based, teacher preparation programs to provide 800 hours of experience in schools prior to licensure. This amount of hours is the highest clinical experience requirement in the United States, and, translated to practice, means that teacher candidates spend more time in schools learning to become teachers than they spend in education coursework. This is why we often refer to teacher preparation as being a joint responsibility of higher education and school districts.
5. **Colorado teacher education programs are reviewed and approved at multiple levels.** Every teacher education program in the state is jointly authorized by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) with reauthorization occurring not more frequently than once every five years. Information about the Colorado reauthorization process is available at <http://highered.colorado.gov/Academics/TeacherEd/>, Programs that prepare teachers

who are responsible for literacy instruction are reviewed by CDE's Colorado Literacy Council. In addition, the majority of teacher preparation programs in the state are nationally accredited either by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) and these are reviewed for reaccreditation every five to seven years. Each of these groups has a particular set of standards, and teacher education programs must meet each set. Higher education institutions also have performance contracts with CDHE, and each one includes a set of agreements that teacher preparation programs report on annually.

- 6. Higher-education teacher preparation programs partner with alternative licensure programs in the state.** Although alternative licensure programs for teachers statutorily require a district or school to recommend its alternative candidates to CDE for licensure, it is often the case that alternative licensure providers partner with higher education-based teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers. The best alternative licensure programs provide coursework and experience during the summer prior to the first year of employment, provide coursework during the school year, sometimes for multiple years and provide coursework in intervening summers. Many of the programs that operate on this model request that a university or college provide all or part of the coursework for licensure and/or a master's degree aligned with licensure.

Future Opportunities

Colorado's higher education-based teacher preparation programs have long been interested in ensuring they prepare high quality educators. Two state initiatives—the Educator ID bill that was passed in 2009 and the Race to the Top application being prepared by state education leaders--will provide new opportunities for improving teacher preparation programs. Several teacher educators and administrators from higher education have been engaged in “Race to the Top” discussions and have been implementing pilot projects that can be ramped up once the Education ID is available. As a result, we have been envisioning new ways of approaching our work, not only in preparing new teachers for the profession, but in improving schools and, ultimately, K-12 student achievement and success.

We envision:

- Common assessment:
 - Teacher education programs and school districts sharing a common set of teaching standards and a common assessment framework for teacher evaluation, such that first year teachers have a clear understanding of what districts expect of teachers, no matter where they are employed.
 - Teacher preparation programs sharing assessment data of teacher candidate performance with the employing districts.
 - Districts individualizing teacher induction on the basis of the evaluations provided by the teacher education programs.
- Developing a common agreement between teacher preparation programs and school districts detailing what new teachers need to know and be able to do, so that districts have a clear understanding of the professional development needs and supports necessary for new teachers prepared by Colorado's institutions of higher education to be successful.
- Institutes of higher education supporting schools and school districts to improve student achievement.
- All teacher candidates having cultural and linguistic competence, ready to effectively teach all of Colorado's children.
- Advanced education for teachers that meet district needs and individual talent by:
 - Districts rewarding teachers for obtaining master's degrees that will make a difference in teaching and learning in classrooms.
 - Choosing teachers with leadership potential to enroll in principal preparation programs.
 - Strategically encouraging teachers to enroll in programs in areas of district need—special education, school psychology, etc.

- Improving, reauthorizing and/or accrediting teacher preparation programs in the state, not by reviewing inputs (such as syllabi and admissions standards), but by reviewing significant outputs—the persistence of graduates in the education profession, classroom teaching performance, and, most importantly, the impact of program graduates on K-12 student learning.
- Ensuring the teacher pipeline is open by working collaboratively with community colleges and quality alternative programs, especially to recruit a diverse teacher corps and teachers for high needs areas (for example, special education and STEM disciplines) and hard-to-staff schools.
- Talented people of all backgrounds lining up to become teachers because CDE has led a campaign to convince the general public that teaching is one of the most important professions and that a starting teacher's salary, at least for new college graduates, is well worth seeking.
- Schools/Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences, school districts and Schools/Colleges of Education partnering with shared responsibility for the preparation of the next generation of teachers, and for their retention in schools, especially the schools that serve high need areas.

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